

ISIS

mother, the beneficent queen of nature,
 encircled with the
 nimbus of moral purity, of immemorial
 and mysterious
 sanctity. Thus chastened and
 transfigured she won many
 hearts far beyond the boundaries of her
 native land. In that
 welter of religions which accompanied the
 decline of national
 life in antiquity her worship was one of
 the most popular at
 Rome and throughout the empire. Some
 of the Roman
 emperors themselves were openly
 addicted to it.¹ And how-
 ever the religion of Isis may, like any
 other, have been often
 worn as a cloak by men and women of
 loose life, her rites
 appear on the whole to have been
 honourably distinguished
 by a dignity and composure, a solemnity
 and decorum well
 fitted to soothe the troubled mind, to ease
 the burdened heart.
 They appealed therefore to gentle spirits,
 and above all to
 women, whom the bloody and licentious
 rites of other
 Oriental goddesses only shocked and
 repelled. We need
 not wonder, then, that in a period of
 decadence, when
 traditional faiths were shaken, when
 systems clashed, when
 men's minds were disquieted, when the
 fabric of empire
 itself, once deemed eternal, began to
 show ominous rents
 and fissures, the serene figure of Isis
 with her spiritual
 calm, her gracious promise of
 immortality, should have
 appeared to many like a star in a stormy
 sky, and should
 have roused in their breasts a rapture of
 devotion not unlike
 that which was paid in the Middle
 Ages to the Virgin
 Resc^m- Mary. Indeed her stately
 ritual, with its shaven and
 , ^{nf}_sto^e tonsured priests, its matins
 and vespers, its tinkling music,

in viadonna. its baptism and aspersions of holy water, its solemn processions, Its jewelled images of the Mother of God, presented many points of similarity to the pomps and ceremonies of Catholicism.² The resemblance need not be purely acci-

¹ Otho often celebrated, or at least Marc-AnrMeet lafindu Monde Aniiqm attended, the rites of Isis, clad in a (Paris, 1882), pp. 570 sqq.; J. Rcvilie, linen garment (Suetonius, Otho, 12). La religion rowaim a Rome sous It's Commodus did the same, with shaven Stveres (Paris, 1886), pp. 54-61; G. head, carrying the effigy of Anubis. Lafaye, Histoire du cnlte dcs divhiifSs See Lampridius, Commodus^9; Spar-cFAlexandrie (Paris, 1884); ^- Meyer tianus, PescenniusNiger, 6; id., Cora- and W. Drexler, s.v. "Isis," in W. M. Roscher's Lexikon der grlcch. itnd rihu.

² L. Preller, Romische Mythologie* Mythologies ii. 360 sqq.; S. Dill, (Berlin, 1881-1883), ii. 373-385; J. Roman *Society in the Last Century of Marquardt, Romische Staatsverwaltung the Western Empire" (London, 1899), (Leipsic, 1885), iii.² 77-81; E. Renan, pp. 79 sq., 85 sqq.; id., Roman Society